

# **Sheridan County Commissioners**

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At approximately 7:15 PM (MDT) Monday, July 26, 2010 an EF3 tornado struck the Smith Ranch at 1313 Rock Springs Road, about 11 miles northwest of Medicine Lake, Montana.

The ranch buildings were demolished by the storm, with three members of the Smith family in the main home when the tornado hit. A community-wide response of area fire and EMS agencies, county authorities including the Sheriffs Department, Disaster and Emergency Services, US Border Patrol, and a large number of family members and neighbors mounted a hazardous and complex search operation during the night. Sheridan County Sheriff Pat Ulrickson stated that, “I’ve never seen anything like this before. The destruction is just indescribable. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Smith family today.”

Barbara Smith, 71 was transported from the basement of her demolished home to Sheridan Memorial Hospital in Plentywood by ambulance, and later evacuated to Billings. Her grandson, Robert (“Robby”) Richardson, 10 and her nephew, Steven D. Smith, 46, were found dead at the scene. Robby was also in the basement of the home; Steve was found about 200 feet away. Coroner David Fulkerson attributed their deaths to blunt force head and chest injuries; they died very quickly.

No other injuries attributable to the storm have been reported, although a few minor injuries were sustained by responders.

On Tuesday, July 27, 2010 officials from Sheridan County, Montana Disaster and Emergency Services and the National Weather Service in Glasgow conducted a damage assessment. In addition to the significant property damage, including a two story house that was completely destroyed, a single wide trailer blown away, numerous outbuildings and ranch vehicles destroyed, there were also livestock and crop losses reported. Approximately 20 cows were killed or seriously injured. Another farm house, that was not lived in, was pushed off its foundation and the barn flattened. Sheridan Electric Cooperative was repairing damage to approximately 6 miles of down power poles and lines. They had restored power to all but a handful of customers by early morning.

The strong tornadic winds were estimated at the Smith Ranch to be approximately 150 miles per hour and it was rated an EF3 on the Enhanced Fujita Scale by National Weather Service meteorologists. The tornado also ripped the deck off a county bridge over Wolf Creek on Three Corner Road. The road is temporarily closed while the Sheridan County Road Department constructs a bypass.

Tanja Fransen, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service stated that yesterday's tornado was one of the strongest and most deadly in Montana history. Only three previous F3 tornadoes have been officially recorded:

<b>DATE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>FATALITIES/INJURIES</b>
June 7, 1946	Roosevelt County	one fatality/one injured
June 19, 1952	Wibaux County	one fatality/two injured
July 5, 1988	Choteau County	two injured

This tornado is the deadliest in Montana since the June 10, 1923 F1 tornado in Mineral County which resulted in two fatalities.

Fransen commented that, "this is a significant tornado for Montana. The length of the tornado path, as well as the maximum width of the tornado is still being calculated but it originated in Daniels County and observers noted that it went up and came down several times as it traveled southeast from Daniels through Sheridan Counties.

Family, friends and neighbors were on scene this morning, assessing the damage and working on finding items that can be saved, and determining how to best clean up the debris.

For information regarding Sheridan County and this disaster, contact: Sheridan County Commissioners, 406-765-1660

For information regarding the Tornado or the Damage rating, contact: Tanja Fransen, 406-228-2850 or 406-230-1151.